United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
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File Code: 1950
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Dear planning participant:

The Moose Creek Ranger District is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for the Johnson Bar Salvage Project on the Moose Creek Ranger District. I welcome your comments and suggestions on the proposed project.

Overview

The Johnson Bar Fire, started on August 3rd, 2014 escaped initial attack and has burned over 13,000 acres across drainages in the Middle Fork Clearwater River and Lower Selway Watersheds; more specifically , Swiftwater, Elk City, Goddard and O'Hara creeks. The fire burned through areas where the Forests were either developing or analyzing several forest or watershed restoration projects under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program: http://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/CFLRP/index.shtml

Amongst the purposes of the CFLR program is to encourage the use of forest restoration by-products to offset treatment costs, benefit local rural economies, and to improve forest health.

CFLRP projects that the Forests planned to develop were generally proposing to utilize commercial timber harvest to restore natural fire regimes, create a balance of age classes across the landscape, restore more resilient tree species and reduce fuel loads to prevent large uncontrollable wildfires. Merchantable timber generated would meet for local and regional needs as well as produce retained funds for the Forests to invest in future restoration work. The occurrence of the Johnson Bar fire has both helped and hindered some of those goals and at the same time created new opportunities.

The Forests are proposing to harvest a proportion of the trees killed by the fire to recover economic value that can be reinvested into restoration work such as reforestation and road decommissioning where economically feasible or where supplemental funding can be used to support restoration work. Timber harvest would help to create the openings needed by early seral species such as ponderosa pine, western white pine and western larch. Harvest would alleviate excessive fuel loadings that could hinder forest development and contribute to additional fire concerns in the future. Openings would help speed the establishment of early successional plant communities which would benefit wintering wildlife.

The subwatersheds with the highest road densities within the lower Selway and MF Clearwater watersheds are Goddard, Elk City and Swiftwater creeks. Within these drainages is where the most high to moderate burn severity was observed. Proposed road decommissioning within these drainages would further reduce sediment delivery into the creeks and roads that are not necessary for future management.

Location

The project is located in Idaho County, Idaho approximately 5 miles south of the Community of Lowell, Idaho. The project occurs within National Forest System lands generally centered around T 32 N, R 7 E, Sec 20, Boise Principle Meridian (see map for legal descriptions). Access to the project areas would utilize Forest Roads #470 (Swiftwater); #9723(Hot Point); #1121(Goddard Point), #9701(Peterson Point) and #653.

A portion of the project area occurs within Middle Fork Clearwater Lochsa-Selway Wild and Scenic River System (WSR). The river segment within the project area is classified as "recreational".

There are no Wilderness Areas, Idaho Roadless Areas or Research Natural Areas within the project area. The majority of the burned area occurs in Forest Plan Management Areas allocated to elk/timber and timber management.

Purpose and Need

Purpose: Provide a sustained yield of resource outputs at a level that will help support the economic structure of local communities and provide for regional and national needs (Nez Perce Forest Plan, II-1)

Need: There is a need to utilize dead trees resulting from the fire in a timely manner to provide social and economic benefits before they lose commercial value and merchantability, which would contribute to the supply of timber for local, regional, and national needs.

Purpose: Reduce potential sediment inputs into the aquatic ecosystem.

Need: Sediment input from gravel and native surface roads can flow into streams, negatively affecting fish habitat and water quality. Improvement of watershed function and stream conditions can be accomplished by reducing road densities and repairing existing roads and culverts to reduce sediment and improve drainage

Proposed Action

The District is proposing to salvage harvest approximately 4,000 acres of dead trees within the approximate 13,000 acre fire area (see map). Harvesting operations would primarily utilize skyline and helicopter logging systems with a small component of ground based tractor skidding where appropriate. Openings are likely to exceed 40 acres.

Approximately 23 segments of temporary roads would be built to provide line machine access from existing system roads. These spurs average approximately 0.16 miles each and would be removed following harvest.

Fire killed or "dead" trees for the purposes of this project are determined using guidelines that determine mortality by the amount of scorch and fire severity surrounding the roots and lower trunk. Field validation of these guidelines indicates they are accurate for the forest types and fire severity in the project area. All live trees will be generally retained however incidental removal may occur to facilitate harvest operations.

Reforestation would plant long lived early seral tree species such as ponderosa pine, western white pine and western larch. This strategy would allow us to continue towards the goal of restoring more resilient tree species across the landscape.

Seventeen to thirty-three tons per acre of standing and down large woody debris would be left across the treatment area to provide soil microclimate and habitat, long term nutrients, soil stability, and snag habitat. For safety reasons, retention would generally occur in clumps rather than individual snags distributed across the units. Retention would generally favor the largest snags.

Approximately 3 miles of unneeded roads may be decommissioned by placing them in a hydrologically stable condition. This may involve a range of road decommissioning methods from culvert removal to full recontouring.

Additional information and maps will be posted to "NEPA Projects" page on the Forests website as they are developed: http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/project_list.php?forest=110117

Project Design

The following design measures would be incorporated into the project to minimize the environmental and social effects of the project.

Soils – Detrimental soil disturbance will be minimized by limiting tractor harvest operations to areas of low severity fire, where duff layers are still on site and where slopes permit the use of ground-based equipment. In skyline harvest areas trees will be limbed and topped in the unit to provide additional slash to yard trees over. Existing disturbance templates (roads, landings, skid trails) will be used where possible to limit additional disturbance.

Fish and Water Quality – There will be no harvest in RHCA's and temporary road and landing construction would be limited to areas that were previously established or designed to minimize or avoid adverse impacts to fisheries and water quality. The project proposes to use existing road and landing templates to the extent practicable and harvest methods will result in low levels of ground disturbance. Temporary roads would generally be located on ridgetops or short spurs to access a ridgetop to facilitate skyline yarding operations. Temporary roads would not cross streams or sensitive wetland areas or be located in a manner that would provide a sediment delivery mechanism to a nearby stream or waterway. Temporary roads would be decommissioned, fully recontoured and/or decompacted following their use. It is anticipated that the road segments would be used and removed in one field season.

Wildlife – Preliminary analysis indicates that there is no habitat for Threatened or Endangered wildlife species in proposed harvest areas. The relatively small percentage of area proposed for harvest combined with snag retention in harvest units would provide ample snag habitat for post fire associated species.

Visuals/WSR – Tree retention would be variable and in clumps with increased retention in visually sensitive areas. Units would not likely be highly visible to casual observers. The Districts are experienced with harvest layout in the WSR to minimize visual effects and protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the corridor.

Helicopter landings may occur in the WSR. Timing of their use would generally occur during lower use periods. The Interface Fuels project on the adjacent Lochsa Ranger District serves as an example of how harvest is implemented in the WSR.

Request for Public Scoping Comments

I recognize the many interests and concerns the public has regarding management on National Forest lands and this is why I am requesting your comments concerning the Johnson Bar Salvage project proposal.

To assure your written comments are fully considered during the analysis of this project, please submit your comments within 30 days of the publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register. Comments submitted after that date will be accepted, but our ability to respond effectively could be reduced.

Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. Those who respond to this invitation for comments will be notified when the Environmental Impact Statement for this project is available for a forty-five day public comment period.

Please address written comments to: Joe Hudson, Moose Creek District Ranger, 831 Selway Road, Kooskia, ID 83539.

Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-northern-nezperce-moose-creek@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments (i.e. Johnson Bar Fire Salvage Project). Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. When commenting, please include the following: (1) your name, address, and (if possible) your telephone number, and organization represented, (if any); (2) title of the document on which you are submitting comments (Johnson Bar Fire Salvage); (3) specific facts and related rationale concerning this project that you feel should be considered.

Should you have questions or need further information, please contact Mike Ward, Interdisciplinary Team Leader (208) 926-6413, or Tam White, Interdisciplinary Team Leader (208) 926-6416. Thank you for your interest in this project.

Sincerely,

Rick Brazell

RICK BRAZELL
Forest Supervisor